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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Legislation before the Appropriations Committee on March 22, 2013
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H.B. NO. 6354, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Honorary Members of the Appropriations Committee,

In 1895, the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) became the first conservation organization established in Connecticut. CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly every year since 1897 on issues such as sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation.

On behalf of CFPA's members and supporters, I submit testimony today on the Governor's Budget with emphasis on one priority: maintaining the independence and effectiveness of the CT Council on Environmental Quality.

As you know, CEQ provides an important, neutral venue to hear public concerns about a wide range of environmental issues. It also puts forward an environmental agenda for the legislature which is always informative and well-researched. CEQ should remain an independent watchdog agency with specific environmental expertise, experience, and focus. Consolidation would dilute its effectiveness, and damage its ability to be an advocate for the natural resources of Connecticut.

We believe our friends at the Connecticut Land Conservation Council stated this most clearly: "It is difficult to understand how a move of the CEQ into an agency with neither a connection to state environmental programs nor expertise in environmental policy would result in any meaningful benefit to the state's budget or general operation. Indeed, it would not be surprising if this move would only serve to exacerbate administrative inefficiencies – with the public and the quality of our environment paying the price."

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important matter. I am glad to respond to any questions you may have.